2013 SYNOD ASSEMBLY BLOG POSTS

"Great Opportunity" - a post-synod assembly video reflection - 2013/06/25

“Go in peace, serve the Lord.” - 2013/06/22

Next time you’re at a restaurant… - 2013/06/22

Is a song better than coffee? - 2013/06/22

Young Adult activity in synod addressed early Saturday - 2013/06/22

What a way to end the day - 2013/06/22

Money, seminary education, elected leadership gain our attention - 2013/06/21

Vignettes in synod and abroad speak of Amazing Grace - 2013/06/21

Opening of an Assembly - 2013/06/21

Twitter & Synod Assembly - 2013/06/05

Tasty breakfast, tantalizing discussion – and other synasm updates - 2013/05/30

Registration open for Synod Assembly - 2013/04/30

Display your ministry at SynAsm - 2013/04/29

One down, more to go - 2013/04/22

SynAsm fee set in April action - 2013/04/11

2013 Synod Assembly Promo Video - Video - 2013/03/26

ALMOST registration & display time - 2013/03/11

Room adjustment for Synod Assembly - 2013/02/20

Since the gavel dropped: 13SynAsm developments - 2013/01/08

2013 synod assembly date set! - 2012/09/17

Bishop Graham reflects on his reelection and other aspects of the 2013 Metro D.C. Synod Assembly in this short video.

"We have such great opportunities around us. We live in a place where the Gospel is really news to a lot of people, and where every congregation is in a mission field, where people really need to hear from us about God's love and God's goodness.

"And to have a mission, to have a reason to be a-live in the church, that might be God's greatest gift to us."

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The assembly closed with a resolution of gratitude and thanksgiving for Harold Sargeant, AIM, who is retiring after faithfully serving the synod for six years, as well as a resolution of gratitude and thanksgiving for all people who worked to organize, plan, and run the Synod Assembly.*

Harold Sargeant received a standing ovation for his service as an Associate in Ministry, including as Synod Administrator prior to his retirement.

Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson commended the Assembly for re-electing Bishop Graham, who he said "brings deep theological wisdom to this office and a passion for the Gospel".

Closing worship began at 12:19, significantly earlier than anticipated. Worship was led by the Rev. Kate Davidson, worship committee chair, and the Rev. Eric Wester, chaplain for the Assembly. It ended with an installation of all people elected to Synod Council or other position of synod leadership.

"Go in peace, serve the Lord." "Thanks be to God!"

————-

**Including you, Rose Beeson! Your words put us all in the room during the 2013 Synod Assembly.*

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"God isn't us looking to create the church, God has called and commanded us to make disciples." The Rev. Phil Hirsch referenced this in his report, but also jokingly called it "The Tale of a Couple Tables" – referencing last night's confusion and discussion over by-law changes that would have changed the "divisions" currently mentioned in the by-laws to the "tables" that currently operate in the synod.

Pr. Hirsch began by showing a series of slides with various metrics regarding worship attendance and congregational life, including adult baptisms which peaked in 2009 and sharply declined since and worship attendance which has been steadily declining since tracking began in 2004. A new metric, "Active Participants," measures people who are active in a congregation but would not be considered members (for whatever reason). It is a new indicator that has been being used by the national ELCA office since 2009.
Pr. Hirsch then called forward the Rev. Dave Sonnenberg, Chair of the Stewardship and Mission Table, who introduced a new resource titled "Embrace Generosity." That handout as well as "Generosity," a 30-day devotional book by Gordon MacDonald, are available.

The following is my paraphrased attempt at taking notes on Pr. Hirsch's presentation on discipleship and challenge that each of us would reach out to a person who is not currently churched and does not know Christ.

- Our efforts to make disciples, to bring people into the faith, cannot be motivated because we want to keep our congregations and the ELCA viable. We need to take a step back… and think about the fruit we hope to be bearing. We know what to do when a young couple brings a baby to us to be baptized, but we don't know what to do when young couples stop bringing their babies to us to be baptized. Lutherans have historically struggled with creating disciples and bringing new people to Christ. The good news however is that God isn't us looking to create the church – God has called and commanded us to make disciples.
- What are disciples, and how do we go about making disciples for Christ? Disciples are ones who sit at the foot of a master and seek to become like that master – an apprentice of the master. Pr. Hirsch shared an incredible story about the Rev. Connie Thompson who shared the hope of the resurrection with a server at a restaurant, and he challenged us to do the same. What would happen if in the next five years each of us were able to reach out to someone who isn't involved in church and doesn't know Christ? We'd go from a synod of around 30,000 to around 60,000. Nationally the ELCA could grow from 4 million to 8 million. It just takes a lot of courage to meet the deepest human need that is out there – the need for connection in the midst of hurt. Underneath the wealth and pretense of perfection in our region there is a deep pain that Christ can heal.

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To break us out of our mid-morning slump, Alice Benson, Regional Gifts Planner with the ELCA Foundation, led us in a rousing ditty sung to the tune of "The Church's One Foundation." The words aptly describe the mission of the ELCA Foundation:

The ELCA Foundation exists to serve us all
with regional gift planners from Florida to St. Paul.
They'll help us serve our Lord Christ
by leaving gifts when gone
and manage our endowments
we'll sing the victor's song.

Both the Rev. Kate Davidson, worship chair, and Amy Acland, synod assembly coordinator, did creative "dancing" behind-the-scenes to smoothly adjust today's revamped agenda.

The Rev. Phil Hirsch, Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop, followed with his report. It introduced new words to the synod organizational vocabulary, starting his talk with the "Tale of Two Tables," and brought in several speakers who described new ministries in the synod. These included a reshaped Together in Mission Event and a personalize-able stewardship resource, "Embracing Generosity."

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The morning opened at 9:35 a.m. with a prayer led by Bishop Hanson.

Travel is one way the synod can nurture young adult ministry, as details of a recent Border Immersion Trip affirmed.

Activities included an almost unanimous vote to refer the by-law changes to Synod Council for further discussion, and reports from synod leaders.

In her report, the Rev. Amy Thompson Sevimli, Assistant to the Bishop, commended to us an article in The Atlantic titled "Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity." The article says that many young adults don't find mainline congregations meaningful because of the lack of focus on the way Jesus really matters in our daily lives. She also invited presenters forward to share stories from two recent synodical trips that were taken by young adults in the synod – one to the US / Mexico border and the other to Israel and Palestine. A Synod Youth Protection Policy has also been created, as requested by a previous Synod Assembly. Pr. Sevimli opened and closed her remarks with the verse: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

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Bishop Graham re-elected!

After worship and dinner, Voting Members tiredly re-assembled to hear the report of the second ballot for bishop. There was loud cheering at the announcement that Bishop Graham had received 211 of the 238 ballots cast, and was therefore re-elected as bishop.

In good Lutheran fashion, the Assembly became carefully involved in detailed discussion surrounding proposed amendments to the bylaws regarding the synod's organizational structure, around divisions and committees. Discussion surrounding the proposed amendments was tabled for further discussion tomorrow.

No TV after dinner for this crew! See the red lines on the screen? Those are proposed changes to synod bylaws considered by this dedicated Assembly before bedtime…

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The afternoon continued on into the business of the synod, hearing reports (available on the website), being introduced to the Mission Spending Plan (synod's budget), receiving greetings from the Rev. Michael Cooper-White, president at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and conducting elections.

That's blogger Rose Beeson (left), with Karen Krueger sharing her perch in the back of the hall, ready to report on the day's events.

All the uncontested positions of synod leadership were elected by acclamation. This resulted in several representatives to Synod Council being elected, as well as members of the Committee on Discipline. Contested positions (positions with more candidates than the number of openings) will have their elections later during this Synod Assembly. A report of the first ballot for bishop was given. Of the 240 ecclesiastical ballots cast in the first ballot for bishop, 180 (75%) were required for election. No election was made.

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Bishop Graham called the assembly back to session after lunch with a standing rendition of "Amazing Grace."

Although Pr. Norma's comments were translated by Pr. Santos, Bishop Graham asked him to "hold off" a bit so we could test our own Spanish recognition.

Afterward, he offered the Bishop's Report. He offered multiple vignettes to share some of the incredibly inspiring stories he has witnessed in his ministry as bishop. He spoke of the synodical trip to Namibia and our Companion Synods there, where he was overwhelmed by the Christian forgiveness, kindness, and charity shown by one of the bishops who had lost a family member in a violent attack. Closer to home, Bishop Graham recently attended a Tamil speaking (from southern India) Lutheran congregation in the Metro D.C. Synod which, after noticing a frightening looking motorcycle gang hanging out across the street, invited them to attend worship and the fellowship meal the following Sunday. This took courage, and it resulted in the bikers attending worship and joining the congregation for a great home-cooked Indian meal! God works in mysterious and amazing ways, Bishop Graham affirmed.

Gifts presented from our Companion Synod in El Salvador

The Rev. Norma Castillo de Menjivar brought greetings from the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod in El Salvador, a Companion Synod with ours. It comprises 57 congregations and ten bishops with a growing national presence. She presented Bishop Graham and the Metro D.C. Synod with a lovely traditional El Salvadoran cross. The Metro D.C. Synod worked hard to facilitate Pr. Norma's husband (also a Lutheran pastor) and children to come visit the U.S. with her. Unfortunately, U.S. officials were not willing to give the children visas, as they thought the family would flee El Salvador. Speaking of a time in her country of excitement and challenge, she especially asked for prayer as her nation elects its next president.

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READY TO ROLL

Chatter in the lobby and the slow trickle of Voting Members into the Synod Assembly hall show that the Metro D.C. Synod's 25th assembly is about to begin. The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is present and will guide us through the process of electing a bishop, as we regularly do every six years. The Rev. Richard H. Graham, current bishop of the Metro D.C. Synod, is eligible for re-election. The Rev. Margrethe Kleiber is new on the dais, filling in for the Rev. John Bradshaw, synod secretary, who is ill.

GETTING STARTED

Synod Assembly opened with worship. A spirit-inspiring rendition of "Built on a Rock" was accompanied by a magnificent grand piano. Bouquets of yellow balloons, emblazoned with the ELCA's 25th anniversary slogan – "Always being made new" – adorn the room, swaying from the ends of the tables. The registrar reported a total of 227 Voting Members present as business began.

NEW CONGREGATION WELCOMED

The Rev. Phil Hirsch, Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop, joyfully welcomed the Oromo Resurrection Evangelical Church, a recent addition to congregations of the ELCA in our synod. Key leaders and a number of youth and young adults regaled the assembly with song and a corresponding slideshow, preceded and followed by warm applause from the assembly.

GREETING FROM GUESTS AND PRESIDING BISHOP

Introduction of guests who quipped about sharing "delightfully short greetings" was immediately segued to the greeting from The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the ELCA. Bishop Hanson challenged all Voting Members and visitors to immediately call/text/tweet/write a friend and share a word of encouragement during the middle of his presentation. Humming conversation arose on the assembly floor as many attendees rose to his challenge and made contact with a friend. He noted that at times, it seems like fear is binding all of our imaginations. He encouraged us to trust that the Holy Spirit is working even when we cannot sense it.

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Tweet and follow #dcsynod for ongoing updates during Synod Assembly activity. And our worship committee chair, the Rev. Kate Davidson, invites us to connect in prayer – even if you can't be in the Plenary Hall – using #dcsynodprayer.

Although the look should be streamlined (compared to how it is now), @dcsynodelca Twitter feeds can also be read from our home page.

By the way – did you notice the new "Election of Bishop" page? While this isn't the only item on the Synod Assembly agenda, but the process is laid out on this page for easy reference.

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Just sent to our congregations, and now posted for all!

REGISTRATION IS ROLLING, but it closes June 7

- Voting Members and Visitors are encouraged to register for the 2013 Synod Assembly, approaching soon on June 21-22. Registration CLOSES on June 7 !!!

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS Special Saturday Morning On-site Breakfast (June 22)

- Based on feedback from prior gatherings, this year time is built-in to informally visit with members of congregations in your area (based upon conferences). During breakfast on Saturday morning, assembly participants can chat over coffee and juice about the many things we have in common, including decisions at hand!
- Don't know which conference you're in? Don't worry. We'll point you in the right direction. "This should be a great time of fellowship, but also an opportunity to discuss [items] important to many lay members," says the Rev. Doug Jones, Synod Assembly chair.

HOMEWORK

- Not exactly. But materials will increasingly be posted to the "Pre-Assembly Materials" page in the next days for your review that maximize productivity of our time together.
- For example, Pr. Jones encourages Voting Members to review proposed bylaw changes to the synod constitution ahead of time. "We will have limited time for debate," he notes, so planning is required to read before discussing and voting.
- Speaking of the proposed Constitution and Bylaws changes, Bishop Graham touches on this subject in a video, introducing the activity of the Shape of the Synod Task Force. To see the video, go to the Forum blog's "Shape of the Synod" post.

and…

DISPLAY SPACE

- June 7 is also the deadline to request display space. See forms and guidelines at http://metrodcelca.org/events/synod-assembly/display-space/.

VOLUNTEERS

- Lots to do, and if you want to pitch in we'll put you to work! Contact Amy Acland at aacland@metrodcelca.org.

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No time like the present! Just because you have until June 7 to register for the 2013 Metro D.C. Synod Assembly doesn't mean you should dawdle… Registration is open.

Also newly posted: Voting Member #s per congregation from the Synod Secretary and more.

And April 30 isn't over yet! Today's the due date for: Nominations, draft Resolutions/Memorials, and Reports. Bring it on!

Our gathering at the National Conference Center in Leesburg, Virginia, is around the corner on June 21-22, 2013.

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Details are up! Ministries interested in spreading the word at Synod Assembly can consider using a display. How? Lots of details on the Display Space page.

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The first document of the list of Pre-Assembly Materials needed in advance of the 2013 Synod Assembly has been posted! The proposed 2014 Mission Spending Plan is now ready for your review. Posting will continue as documents become available.

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Synod Council acted this week to set fees for the 2013 Metro D.C. Synod Assembly.

“The fees for the 2013 Synod Assembly [are] set at $369 per person, with housing available for an additional charge of $110 per room,” as finalized on April 8, 2013.

Although registration is not yet open, this will be the fee structure for the event coming June 21-22.

And while we’re looking ahead, be prepared for longer-than-usual days. In order to keep our commitment to a two day format, the draft agenda keeps us busily in session well into Friday evening.

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Get ready! The ELCA Metro D.C. Synod will be meeting June 21-22, 2013. Here's a taste of what's to come and info for getting involved. Let's spend some time "praying, discerning, renewing."

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Straight from our Synod Assembly coordinator…

1. Registration for the 2013 Synod Assembly will be coming soon.
2. Display space registration info will also go live soon.

"I've had five inquiries just today," says Amy Acland. Glad we're all looking forward to this opportunity!

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Plans are advancing smoothly for our forthcoming Metro D.C. Synod Assembly, to be held June 21-22, 2013.

Choose a nice room at the National Conference Center or your own bed. Lodging is not included in the 2013 Synod Assembly registration fee.

One clarification – the 2013 Synod Assembly fee of *[3/11/13 - dollar figure removed as discussion is in process]* as announced in the "Since the gavel dropped" post (1/8/13) does NOT include lodging. Lodging arrangements will be made independently of Synod Assembly registration. We're making those dollars stretch as far as we can, but they didn't stretch that far!

In the meantime, please keep the April 30th deadline in mind. By this date · reports, · election nominations, and · resolutions/memorials should be submitted.

NOTE (added 2/25/13): For planning purposes, you may want to know that all rooms have ONE bed at the National Conference Center.

Questions? Amy Acland, Synod Assembly Coordinator, can be reached at aacland@metrodcelca.org or 202-417-3678.

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The new year may have just begun, but your Synod Assembly Planning Committee has been perking along since the gavel dropped in 2012.

Here are some items in the hopper for 2013… and beyond.

- As many have already noted, the 2013 Synod Assembly will take place in **one session**. Looking ahead, the one session format will continue.
- An **odd year/even year pattern** will begin, alternating between a two-day Synod Assembly (like 2013) at a conference facility, followed by a one-day Synod Assembly (next up – 2014) the following year at a church location. This maintains the value of getting together and allows time for doing required business, while minimizing costs.
- The **fee structure** will reflect this alternating year design. As adopted by the Metro D.C. Synod Council on November 17, 2012, the 2013 Synod Assembly fee will be *[3/11/13 - dollar figure removed because fee in discussion]*. As we all know, conference facility fees in the greater D.C. area are substantial, but they offer arrangements required by a group of our size doing focused activity. This fee will be lower for the 2014 Synod Assembly at $99 per participant, as adopted by the Synod Council, reflecting the different venue and duration.
- **Visitors** can attend for a separate fee. For 2013, the fee is set at $250.

Told you the planning team has been active! There's more…

- The **theme** synod activity in 2013 is: "Praying, Discerning, Renewing."
- The agenda for the 2013 Synod Assembly, while clearly in early draft form, is full. A highlight will be the **election of a synod bishop**.
- To complete what we need to do in the time allowed, there will be **no workshops and no guest speaker** for the 2013 Synod Assembly.
- We know who our **ELCA Representative** will be, however – the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, ELCA Presiding Bishop. He will bring greetings and news from the churchwide expression of the ELCA, as well as assist with our election process.
- A **display area** will be reserved for the 2013 Synod Assembly. Fee is set at $40 per table, with table location being assigned by the Synod Assembly Planning Committee.
- A **Fair Trade display** is anticipated at the 2013 Synod Assembly.

Say to yourself, "April 30th, April 30th, April 30th…" This is the deadline for several pre-Assembly markers.

- By April 30, nominations and Candidate Information Forms for **synod leadership positions up for election** should be submitted. Find the list of positions and necessary details on the Nominations/Elections page.
- By April 30, **draft Resolutions and Memorials** need to be submitted to the Reference and Counsel Team, which prepares them for presentation to the Synod Assembly. Info about this process is found on the Resolutions/Memorials page.
- And by April 30, **units of the synod** need to submit their **reports** so we all can have a view of the exciting ministry being done at the synodical expression of the church.

Other than that, check that June 21-22, 2013 is on your calendar and stay tuned for additional developments! In the meantime, contact Amy Acland, synod assembly coordinator, with questions at aacland@metrodcelca.org.

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By action of the Synod Council this weekend, dates have been assigned for the 2013 Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod Assembly:

Friday & Saturday, June 21-22, 2013.

Mark your calendars!

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The ELCA Metro D.C. Synod elected the Rev. Richard H. Graham bishop in 2007. Next year, the 2013 Synod Assembly will again be tasked with elections for the office.

The process used in our synod is the ecclesiastical ballot – starting with any person ordained in the ELCA. See the synod's Constitution & Bylaws for specifics (under "For Congregations" tab). We're thinking of ways to make this run as smoothly as possible.

Your Synod Assembly Planning Committee is considering best practices for an efficient process. I found some practices used by the Episcopal Diocese of Washington very interesting leading up to the election of Bishop Marianne Budde and their leadership transition. Learn something about their process here. I also like how the ELCA Rocky Mountain Synod kept their members informed.

As our synod's plans coalesce, we will do our best to effectively share what's happening with our members and congregations!

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